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ABSTRACT

As literature reveals both the connections of all the humanities and the continuity of Canadian life, it can provide the Canadian child with a means of fitting his private experiences into a broader content. These facts pose a challenge in creating a continuity between new high school introductory courses in Canadian literature and more advanced courses on the college level. In the university, new areas need to be developed (mixing Canadian, American, British, and translated foreign materials, or emphasizing the local and peculiar within Canada), while older areas need to be re-developed (courses on Shakespeare, Dickens, nineteenth century poets, Hardy). Literature courses would reflect Canada's strong senses of continuity with its past--the old country, its mores, arts, and social patterns--and of dignity, order, and cohesion. (JM)

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CONTINUITY IN CANADIAN STUDIES: HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

Elizabeth Waterston

My title is ambiguous: I could talk about continuity between the kind of Canadian studies we do in college classes, and those you do in High School. Or I could discuss continuity within Canadian studies: continuity as a central principle which we might well emphasize whenever we work with Canadian materials.

Continuity with the past--that we should accentuate; also a sense of the connections, the geographical and historical continuum of European and American and Canadian literatures. We should stress the continuity within Canada, the old East-West totality, and the connectedness of each local scene with the region, and with the whole country.

Now that Canadian studies are becoming stylish at all levels of education, we educators should use them to build links, not to atomize and separate. Literature has always been a connector, a prism of all the humanities. Literature catches the philosophy of the time, the psychology of the author, the social stances of the populace. Literature also reveals the subtle connection of all these things. Canadian literature therefore reveals the continuity, the connectedness of Canadian life. It can serve as a way for the Canadian child to fit his private experience into a bigger context. This is the philosophical heart of my comments on Canadian studies. I will return to this theme, after considering the more immediate and practical problem: how to manage continuity between student work at high school and at University.

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Canadian studies are new for most of us teachers. Very few people now teaching English took courses in Canadian literature when they were themselves students. There were always some excellent courses in Canadian, but these were not considered part of the core of the old English Honours programme. Some of us chose those Canadian courses as electives; more of us had no such choice. In many Colleges "Can Lit" consisted of a mini-review tucked in at the tail of a course on American literature--and Mrs. Moodie got very short shrift in a course that dealt with Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville et al! Very few of us used these courses, anyway, when we began to teach, because the curriculum in High Schools emphasized other choices in literature. Canadian didn't count for Colleges of Education. You moved into your first job with one eye on your old Shakespeare notes and the other eye on the classroom...but you had to file your notes on Morley Callaghan and Earle Birney.

Now--and I think "now" means post-1967--the canon of English writing considered appropriate for study has changed. In Ontario, the change can be dated also as coming at the time the Grade 13 "external exams" ceased to monitor the curriculum and the emphases in literary studies in the high schools. Suddenly teachers could choose their readings more freely, and this power of choice coincided with a surge of Canadian nationalism. "Read Canadian! Buy Canadian! Teach Canadian!" The High school teachers faced a new set of books, thanks to these cries.

This is the source of my own book, Survey: A Short

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History of Canadian Literature. Ex-students, who had perhaps done Victorian courses with me, were asking for my reading lists from my Canadian courses, because they were being asked to work up Canadian content in their courses. I sent out these hand-outs, plus comments on how I was doing the course, plus urgings to try this or that author. Then I was asked by my publisher, Methuen, to prepare a short set of notes along these lines for all teachers and for the general reader moving into this field and wanting a brief guide. Well--the idea grew, as publishers' ideas tend to, and I wound up writing a biggish book. I hope Survey will prove useful as a base from which teachers and classes can work, either as a text or as a resource book. That will obviously provide a nice continuity between college and high school, as far as I am concerned! But next fall I myself will face a new problem: Once the students have Survey, what will I do in my own classes?

Seriously, University teachers of Canadian literature will face just this question, very soon. We have been doing "introductory" courses. Now we must develop more advanced courses that will appropriately lead on from the High Schools' new introductory CanLit offerings. We face a related problem: what will happen in our classic courses, our courses on Shakespeare and the nineteenth century poets, on Dickens and Hardy and so on, if High School students come to us without any preliminary exposure to these writers? Thus there is a double problem for us: developing new areas, and re-developing older ones. And

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then, for us as for you, there is the always-present problem of the mixed public: for you, the classroom with its mixture of university-directed and other students: people who need pre-college training, and others who need to find in literary studies some quite other values, some non-academic meanings. In our case, we must try in our courses--Can Lit or other--to train Honours students for graduate work, to help future teachers develop a general sense of literature as an enlarging and relevant discipline, and to provide stimulus, refreshment, and aesthetic pleasure to the general student.

We must experiment and change and develop; and the shift in Canadian studies' popularity may well exert a useful pressure on us to reassess our offerings. What can we at the colleges do to exploit the growing interest in Canadian studies in the students you are now sending us?

What can <u>you</u> do that will be a good base for University work, but will differ appropriately from it? I would suggest two opposite possibilities: expand your range, or contract it radically.

You could expand by mixing Canadian, American and British materials, and adding some of the great European works in translation. In the University, courses still seem locked into a division between "British" and "American" literatures. In High School, there can be an exciting mix--by period, or by theme, with Canadian work spot-lighted against an international background. Thus the new nationalism could lead paradoxically to

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an international flavour.

Alternatively, you could emphasize the local and peculiar in your courses. For instance, in Guelph one Secondary School teacher is helping his students "go Guelph", developing a local list of authors from our area, from old Alexander McLachlan in the 1850's to Tim Inkster who is issuing his "Mrs. Grundy Poems" from his Porcépic Press at Erin today. They are reading John Galt's novels, Pauline Johnston's rare Elora poems, Gordon Greene's essays on Arthur. Building on this kind of course, we plan at the University to move into courses which emphasize the abstract questions of regionalism and local colour in literature. As an alternative we plan to focus on time rather than place as an organizing principle in our Canadian course.

In general, as Canadian courses grow strong in the high schools--and obviously I hope and believe they will--then the University courses must shift. The main point is that we each should know what the other is doing. High School teachers need to keep an eye on our publications, seminars, briefs; University teachers should observe curriculum changes, teaching practices, and the definitions of objectives emerging in the high schools.

May I offer an anecdote? When Irving Layton was poet-in-residence at the University of Guelph, I was greatly stimulated by his workshops and his readings, and carried his controversial ideas into my classes on Canadian poetry. One of my students that term was a teacher, who was dashing from the neighbourhood school during her spare periods. She would listen to me on

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Layton, puff back to class, and pass along the latest discussion. One of my daughters was in her class--and at dinner our family would hear the latest word on Layton, as the high school class had hammered it out! What a uniquely Canadian story! The artist and the community linked; the High School and the University linked; the student and the artist linked. And with that anecdote I return to my first thesis, that linkage is a Canadian--maybe the Canadian phenomen.

In Canada, continuity is a principle and a fact. We cherish our sense of a past. Our often-mocked garrisons maintained links with the old country, its mores and arts and social patterns. The idea of loyalty to an "old country" is not far in our past. The Canadian immigrant rarely came with a sense of breaking old ties, starting a completely new life. Our hero is no Adam, washed clean of his past. The Canadian artist keeps his connection with other art-worlds--for one thing he must still look abroad for markets. He keeps up also his reading in British, American and European literature.

Our sense of links with nature has perhaps kept a romanticism dominant in our art, our painting and our poetry. Faced with a strong-toned environment, our impule seems to have been not to escape but to retain, to build and to improve. We have not been so much victims, as gardeners in nature, cultivating our environment.

We have cultivated also our relations with our neighbours, rather than alienating or isolating ourselves.

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Our ideal--the ideal most often expressed in our literature--seems to me to be peace, adjustment, growth (not, in spite of our talented young critic, survival). We Canadians in our literature have recorded a desire for order, for dignity, for cohesion; in other words, for the enhancement of nature's gifts. Surely that Canadian dream of continuity in nature, in society, and in self is a desire which teachers can respect and encourage.